

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

AMERICA, RAY CHARLES STYLE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 14, 2004

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I commend Mr. William Raspberry on his column in the Washington Post on July 5, 2004. Mr. Raspberry described well the importance of the life and music of Mr. Ray Charles. The way Ray Charles embraced the wonderful qualities of the United States is extremely important for many African-Americans who grew up in segregated America. As Mr. Raspberry stated, many African-Americans feel like outsiders in this country, but Mr. Charles was able to embrace and celebrate the presence of brotherhood and justice as fundamental American values. The music of Ray Charles transcended barriers between black and white. His life and music will never be forgotten. I applaud Mr. Raspberry for reminding his readers of the impact this great man had on so many. I hope that my colleagues join me in honoring Ray Charles by supporting the bill I introduced, H.R. 4633, which authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to create a gold medal honoring this great American performer.

[From the Washington Post, July 5, 2004]

AMERICA, RAY CHARLES STYLE

(By William Raspberry)

I'll know that today is the "Fourth of July" (no matter what the calendar insists) when I hear my friend's stereo pulsing out "America the Beautiful."

The Ray Charles version, of course.

Charles's recent death, at 73, brings it to mind, but I've been aware for some years now how his prayerful exaltation of America has become the virtual theme song of the Fourth of July. What did Americans have for a theme song before that? Was it all Sousa marches, with hot dogs and applause-line oratory?

Charles transformed the holiday for me—from the Norman Rockwell tableaux that never seemed to include anyone who looked like me—to a holiday for all Americans.

And how did he manage that?

Maybe I should start with what may be my one important insight: that in most controversies, thoughtful people secretly believe both sides, espousing the one and suppressing the other depending on the company it puts them in. That is why it is so hard to find white Southerners of my approximate age who will admit to having been racists back in the days of Jim Crow.

What they recall, I believe, is that they harbored misgivings about the way things were, and now they find it more comfortable to recall the misgivings than their toleration of the way things were. I always believed that segregation was wrong. . . . And they did.

I have harbored similar misgivings about the willingness of black Americans to think of this country as someone else's house—and to view it as complaining outsiders looking in. Of course there has always been ample basis for black people to feel like outsiders, at the very least to internalize W.E.B.

DuBois's sense of the "twoness" of being black in America. But didn't we, perhaps, overdo the outsider-ness?

You see, I always cherished America—even if I acknowledged it only as the too-seldom played B-side of my consciousness. Charles's "America" invited me to turn the record over.

Charles could do that. He had a way of cutting through the confusions and mixed emotions and preconceptions, and reaching us at our core. The genius that made it possible for him to universalize the blues and spirituals and country—anything he touched—made it possible for him to universalize patriotism, too.

But if Ray Charles changed the Fourth of July with his "America the Beautiful," he also changed the song. "God done shed His grace on thee! He crowned thy good, yes he did, in a brotherhood."

The shift isn't merely from Katharine Lee Bates's elegant lyric to the black vernacular; it is a shift in meaning.

As Kenneth Moynihan noted in a recent commentary in the Worcester (Mass.) Telegram & Gazette, Bates penned a prayer: "[May] God shed his grace on thee and crown thy good with brotherhood." Ray made it a fait accompli.

As Moynihan put it, "A fervent hope for the future has been turned into a happy fact of the present."

It is not, Moynihan argues, an improvement.

"People much prefer to believe in their own righteousness and that of the nation than to think about their failings," he wrote. "No doubt the passionate affirmation of American brotherhood as a divine dispensation already granted accounts for a healthy share of the popularity of Mr. Charles's rather radical modification of the song."

He's right, of course. And maybe he'd be right to remind those white Southerners I talk to that they really did used to be racists. Sometimes, though, I think it's not a bad idea to let people believe that their nobler instinct represents their "true" self—that it is their greed, their envy and their bigotry that are the aberration. You know: "As a man believeth in his heart, so he is."

At least for this day, can't we imagine that we are brothers (and sisters) "from sea to shining sea"? And be grateful for that?

Ray Charles says it's all right.

PUNJAB GOVERNMENT CANCELS DEAL THAT ALLOWED DIVERSION OF WATER TO OTHER STATES

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 14, 2004

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, the Legislative Assembly of Punjab recently annulled a long-standing agreement that allowed the diversion of water from Punjab to other states.

According to the Tribune of Chandigarh, whose article I will be inserting in the RECORD at the end of my remarks, the Legislative Assembly asserted the sovereignty of Punjab in

doing so. The newspaper reports that the bill passed by the Legislative Assembly says that "as a sovereign authority [Punjab] considered it its duty to uphold the Constitution and the laws and to protect the interests of its inhabitants."

Apparently, all parties supported this measure. We congratulate them on taking this step forward to protect the interests of the people of Punjab. I urge them to continue claiming, promoting, and establishing the sovereignty of Punjab.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the people of Punjab have been severely oppressed by the tyrannical Indian government. Over a quarter of a million Sikhs have been killed since 1984, according to the Punjab State Magistracy. The Movement Against State Repression reports that 52,268 have been taken as political prisoners, held without charge or trial, some as long as 20 years. According to the Punjab Human Rights Commission, about 50,000 Sikhs have simply been made to disappear by being arrested, tortured, killed in police custody, declared "unidentified bodies," and secretly cremated, without their remains even being given back to their families.

Similar repression has been visited on Christians, Muslims, and other minorities. Yet India continues to say that it is the world's largest democracy.

If India is truly a democracy, it will allow the will of the people to be carried out in regards to the diversion of water. It will allow the people—Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Assamese, Bodos, Dalits, Manipuris, Tamils, and everyone living under Indian rule—to enjoy the full range of human rights. And it will allow self-determination for these sovereign states.

Until that happens, Mr. Speaker, we should not provide any aid to India. And we should take a stand for self-determination, which is the cornerstone of democracy, by supporting a free and fair plebiscite on independence in Punjab, Khalistan, in Kashmir, in predominantly Christian Nagaland, and everywhere that people seek their freedom from Indian rule. The assertion of sovereignty by the Punjab Legislative Assembly is a good first step. They should act to claim their sovereignty by severing their ties to India. We should take a stand by letting them know that when they do, we will be there with them.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, I would like to insert the Tribune article into the RECORD at this time.

PUNJAB ANNULS ALL WATER PACTS, CONG, AKALIS JOIN HANDS ON ISSUE

Chandigarh, July 12—A special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha today unanimously passed the Punjab Termination of Agreements Bill, 2004, thereby "knocking down" the very basis on which the Supreme Court had passed its order on construction of SYL—Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal on June 4, last.

This Bill annuls the December 31, 1981, agreement between Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan signed by the three Chief Ministers in the presence of the late Ms. Indira Gandhi and also all other agreements relating to the water of the rivers, Ravi and Beas.

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